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STATE FOR NEA/MAG (MHARRIS), PM (LOFTIS), AND G/TIP (PATEL)  
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/29/2016  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SMIG](#) [MARR](#) [TS](#)  
SUBJECT: DAS GRAY MEETING WITH TUNISIAN DEPUTY FOREIGN  
MINISTER FOR THE AMERICAS AND ASIA

REF: A. TUNIS 1675

- [1](#)B. TUNIS 1642
- [1](#)C. TUNIS: 1621
- [1](#)D. TUNIS: 1603

Classified By: Ambassador William Hudson, for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C//NF) SUMMARY. During his June 27-28 visit, NEA Deputy Assistant Secretary Gordon Gray met with Deputy Foreign Minister for the Americas and Asia, Saida Chtioui, to discuss the USG position on Libya, Tunisian relations with Iran, USG support for Guatemala for the Latin American Security Council seat (REF C), Security Council reform, the transition from African Union to UN peacekeeping forces in Darfur (REF A), the Status of Forces Agreement (REF D), establishing an IRI presence, and USG concern regarding freedom of expression and human rights. Chtioui raised questions about the USG position on U.N. Security Council reforms and concerns about the recent TIP report. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) PARTICIPANTS:

U.S.:  
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Gordon Gray, NEA Deputy Assistant Secretary  
Ambassador William Hudson, Embassy Tunis  
Ellen Bienstock, CAO, Embassy Tunis (notetaker)

Ministry of Foreign Affairs:  
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Saida Chtioui, Deputy Foreign Minister for the Americas and Asia  
Ghazi Jomaa, Director General, Americas and Asia Division  
Moez Sinaoui, Deputy Director, Americas Division

[1](#)3. (C) BILATERAL RELATIONS: Gray took Chtioui's point that distinguishing among North African countries was important and pointed out Deputy Secretary Zoellick's visit last month as an example of the recognition in Washington that Tunisia has set itself apart from others in the region in many areas of reform. He reiterated Zoellick's suggestion that we create a broader based discussion on common agenda items like economic reform and assured Chtioui that we would be in touch soon after internal deliberations were complete. However, he

expressed our continued concern regarding freedom of expression and human rights and specifically raised the issue of jailed lawyer Mohamed Abbou. Chtioui lamented what she considered another of the "pre-conceived opinions" that governments outside of Tunisia have. She insisted that Abbou was in jail because he assaulted one of his colleagues. The Ambassador clarified that Abbou had been convicted on two accounts: assault and an internet article critical of the government. Chtioui insisted that the publishing of the article was not illegal; rather, it was the incitement of Tunisians to disobey the government. She pointedly chastised Europeans in general for misrepresenting human rights issues in their media and within their governments. She insisted that it was not possible to condemn anyone for writing against the government, and gave several examples of those who have done so and have not been imprisoned. Both Gray and Chtioui agreed that previous discussions between former DRL A/S Lorne Craner and the GOT were a positive process toward mutual agreement and that that the Deputy Secretary's efforts to get back to a similar type of dialogue would be welcome. Chtioui offered a discussion of "all matters - no taboos."

¶4. (C) Chtioui mentioned that the FM would like to visit in October and requested our help in fixing appointments and advising the GOT on the best time to visit. She also noted that the GOT plans to invite U/S Karen Hughes for a visit to Tunisia. She encouraged more exchange visits to further mutual understanding and noted that the more candid we could be the better.

¶5. (C) IRI: Gray asked about the status of IRI's request to establish an office in Tunisia. Chtioui spoke positively of IRI-GOT relations but emphatically stated she could not understand why it was not enough to maintain relations as they are and why the USG insisted on the matter given that

this was supposed to be an NGO. She wondered why a physical presence was necessary. Gray explained that in-country presence would be more efficient, similar to having embassy presence in-country to deal with diplomatic issues. Chtioui explained that the GOT resists an IRI physical presence because it has historically had problems with NGOs, in particular from Europe. The GOT's concern, she explained, was that European NGOs would finance local NGOs, which is contrary to Tunisian law. She referenced IRI and NDI activities in Egypt and Bahrain, which Gray countered by noting that several other countries in the region have been receptive to their presence. When asked if an IRI representative could come for discussion with the MFA, Chtioui responded that they would be welcome as long as the discussion was around the implementation of programs rather than the opening of a bureau. She requested that we make sure IRI representatives really understood the reality of the country and not come, as people often do, with "preconceived opinions," which they then proceed to try to prove. She noted, for example, the many "insulting" things about Tunisia IFEX wrote that appeared in the press. She also requested that representatives come with an understanding of the distinction between Maghreb and other African countries. Chtioui noted that she had met several times with former DRL A/S Lorne Craner and that some of his requests had been implemented. Gray suggested that perhaps the standard for future discussion should be previous "successful implementation" of programs.

¶6. (C) SOFA: Gray asked about the status of the SOFA discussion, noting that the MOD had indicated it had some modifications but was prepared to move forward (REF D). Chtioui, appearing exasperated, commented that the MFA and MOD had agreed to the text but that the MOD had one or two details to work out considering the overall implementation of the agreement. She suggested that the situation could be resolved among defense experts from each side. The Ambassador agreed to convey the message to Washington. (NOTE: The Minister of Defense told the Ambassador on 6/29 that he hoped the GOT's written response would be ready in July (REF A). END NOTE.)

¶7. (C) LIBYA: Gray began the meeting by explaining the Secretary of State's May 15 announcement of her intention to

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restore full diplomatic relations with Libya and rescind Libya's designation as a state sponsor of terrorism. Chtioui expressed the GOT's pleasure with these decisions and drew attention to the GOT's work over the years to help improve U.S.-Libyan relations. She expressed the hope that this milestone would further advancement of Arab Maghreb Union cooperation and offered additional GOT assistance should it be needed.

¶8. (C) IRAN: Chtioui expressed the GOT's satisfaction with the USG decision to negotiate with Iran and informed us that the GOT had beseeched Iran through diplomatic channels to negotiate on the issue of atomic energy through the International Atomic Energy Agency, the European Union, and the U.S. now that they are open to such a dialogue. Chtioui explained that the GOT has also been steadily improving relations with Iran over the past few years, including participating in a joint conference with Iran two months ago. Tunisia, she said, abstained from voting when they sat on the IAEA Board of Directors in order to maintain a vantage point for negotiation.

¶9. (C): TIP: Chtioui expressed frustration with reports coming out of Washington and other places that misrepresent the truth about Tunisia. She pointed specifically to the TIP report, which the GOT thought was "very disappointing." The Ambassador explained that the TIP report was a good example of the cooperation between the USG and the GOT, that Tunisia had a very favorable report, and that the Embassy had conveyed to Washington Tunisia's hard work to combat TIP. Chtioui expressed frustration with the TIP narrative for the Netherlands, which referred to a court case that had taken place there. The Ambassador said he was unaware of this section of the report and promised to look into it. Chtioui pled for the USG to understand that the GOT is doing the best it can and to give it the recognition it deserves.

¶10. (U) Gray has cleared this cable.

HUDSON